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ABSTRACT

This exhibition guide provides critical analysis, historical perspective, and brief biographies of 15 self-taught African-American artists whose works were displayed. "Ashe," an African word meaning "the power to make things happen," was used as the theme of the exhibition. The guide verbalizes the exhibit's investigation of the methods of making art and the motives of the makers by exploring the choice of materials (recycled objects) and the modes of creation (improvisational). Chapter one is entitled "Sorting Out a Context for Self-taught Art." The critique also examines the works' intellectual lineage traced from African spiritualism. Artists featured in this exhibition are: (1) E. M. Bailey; (2) Hawkins Bolden; (3) T. J. Bowman; (4) Thornton Dial; (5) Thornton Dial, Jr.; (6) Ralph Griffin; (7) Bessie Harvey; (8) Lonnie Holley; (9) Joe Light; (10) Ronald Lockett; (11) Charlie Lucas; (12) Leroy Person; (13) Juanita Rogers; (14) Arthur Spain; and (15) Jimmie Lee Sudduth. (MM)

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ÀSHE: IMPROVISATION & RECYCLING IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN VISIONARY ART

Tom Patterson, Curator

ÀSHE "The power to make things happen"

February 2 - March 29, 1993

Diggs Gallery at Winston-Salem State University
601 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive
Winston-Salem, NC 27110
(919) 750-2458

Front Cover: Lonnie Holley in his outdoor studio, Birmingham, Alabama-Photo by Roger Manley

Back Cover: Bessie Harvey-Photo by True Kelly

Catalogue Design: Jan Oliver Alms-Galaxy Graphics

ÀSHE FESTIVAL: SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 1993 - 9AM-4PM

Visiting Artists: Bessie Harvey
Lonnie Holley
Charlie Lucas

Visiting Scholars: Judith McWillie
Dr. Regenia Perry
Dr. Robert Farris Thompson

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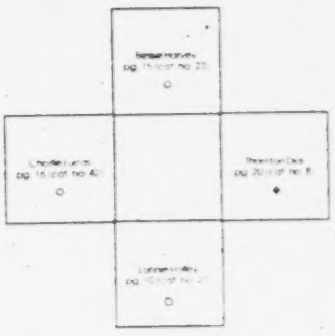
Key to artwork details, front cover



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○ Richard Hacker
◆ Gamma One Conversions

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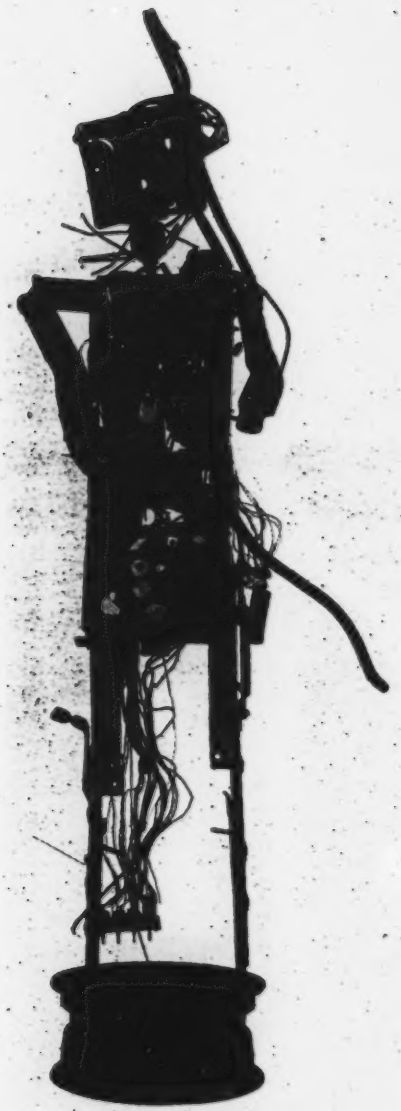

Charlie Lucas, *Radio Man* (cat. no. 40)
Photo by Marti Griffin

E.M. Bailey
•
Hawkins Bolden
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T.J. Bowman
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Thornton Dial
•
Thornton Dial Jr.
•
Ralph Griffin
•
Bessie Harvey
•
Lonnie Holley
•
Joe Light
•
Ronald Lockett
•
Charlie Lucas
•
Leroy Person
•
Juanita Rogers
•
Arthur Spain
•
Jimmie Lee Sudduth

Introduction

This exhibit and each work in it embodies power. "Ashe—the power to make things happen. No one word better speaks for the work in this exhibition or for the spirit of the artists.

I first felt the spiritually charged energy of this work in 1989, when Dr. Robert Bishop (1938-1991) took me into his office at the Museum of American Folk Art (I was then a graduate student at New York University) to show me a "surprise." Bob shared with me the slides of art by newly "discovered" artists Lonnie Holley, Charlie Lucas and the Dial family. I think Bob knew that he was taking me down a pathway of aesthetic discoveries that I would continue to explore, as I do in complete wonder today.

Unlike numerous other museum shows focusing on work by self-taught artists, this exhibit investigates the methods of making and the motives of the makers by exploring the choice of materials (the recycled objects) and the modes of creation (improvisational). The visionary/outsider/folk art field has only recently begun to study the aesthetics and intentions of this work and the artists and to give this art the same kind of scholarly and critical attention any period of art deserves. The field of self-taught art is crying out for more critical analysis and thinking: so, too, are the artists. In a recent phone conversation with Lonnie Holley, he encouraged me—and in the same breath all curators, arts administrators and writers—to actively champion and interpret his art and the art of his contemporaries, such as Charlie Lucas, Bessie Harvey, Hawkins Bolden and Thornton Dial. To quote Lonnie, "You are the translators, the apostles of this work." It is the job of art professionals committed to the visionary field to "spread the message" found in this artwork and make it understandable to all. The spirituality and generous humanity in Lonnie's plea-slash-command makes it all the more awe-inspiring.

Located on the campus of a historically black university, Diggs Gallery at WSSU is committed to promoting and exhibiting art by African-Americans. "ASHE: IMPROVISATION & RECYCLING IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN VISIONARY ART is one of several exhibitions past, present and future that explore the Africanisms in American art; this show also kicks off the gallery's curatorial effort to periodically show art that celebrates all of the cultures of the African diaspora.

Brooke Anderson, Director, Diggs Gallery

Hawkins Bolden, untitled construction (cat. no. 5) Photo by Marti Griffin

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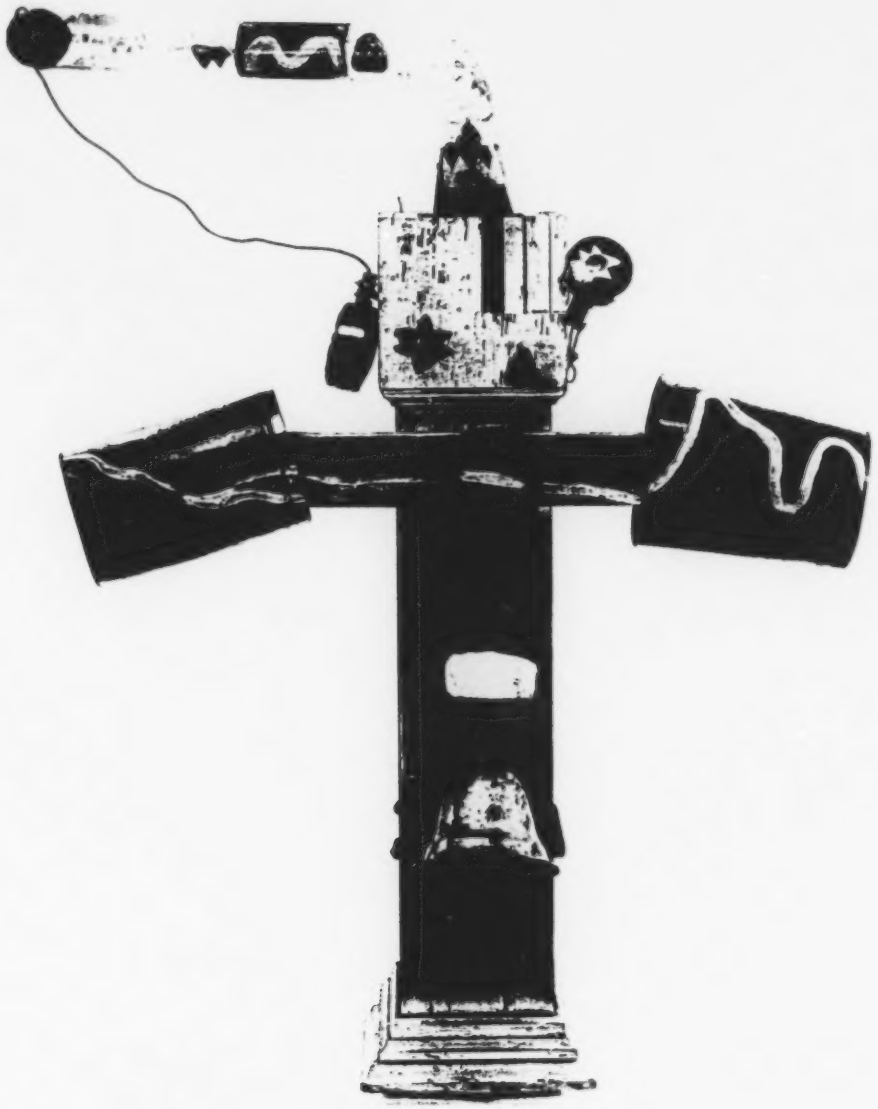

Joe Light, *Thank the Lord* (cat. no. 34) Photo by Marti Griffin

ASHE: IMPROVISATION & RECYCLING IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN VISIONARY ART

by Tom Patterson

I. Sorting Out a Context for Self-Taught Art

For nearly a century now, the art world has witnessed a growing fascination with the work of independently motivated artists whose talent, imagination and inventiveness amply compensate for their lack of formal art training. Until about 20 years ago, interest in this work was largely confined to the elite inner circles of the art world, but that began to change in the wake of the socio-political/cultural revolutions of the 1960s.

Awareness of this phenomenon—variously called art brut, outsider art, contemporary folk art, idiosyncratic art, grassroots art and a host of other names—spread to include writers, curators, art dealers and increasing numbers of mainstream artists. The 1970s saw the first major exhibitions of this work and articles about it in popular magazines and newspapers, and by the '80s the artists were appearing on national TV shows and having their work mass-produced on the covers of rock music albums. Thousands of people who had never collected art started buying the paintings, sculptures and constructions made by these artists; commercial galleries in a number of American cities started sidelining if not specializing in "outsider" art; and museums across the country began hosting exhibitions of work by these uncertified and seemingly "naive," low-culture mavericks from the sticks and the backwoods.

The unprecedented attention that has been devoted to this art in recent years can best be understood as a manifestation of a larger cultural phenomenon or, more accurately, several overlapping and intertwined cultural phenomena. Among its other legacies, the memorable decade of the 1960s spawned a kind of generational yearning for authenticity, to which these artists and their unpretentious work strongly appealed. This art also spoke forcefully to the deep current of anti-elitism that runs through American society, and to a spirit of cultural democracy that has been growing in this country since the end of World War II. And its increasing visibility happened

to coincide nicely, too, with other related developments in the worlds of "high" art and popular culture during the late '70s and the '80s—a renewed interest in bold, figure-based artwork; a kind of mini-renaissance in street-based art forms such as graffiti, hip-hop and break-dancing; and the populist, do-it-yourself spirit of punk-rock and garage rock, to name a few of the more obvious examples of these trends.

Now that we're well into the '90s and some of its novelty has worn off, the art world is in the process of reassessing and refining its view of this non-mainstream art, struggling with some of the difficult questions that surround it, and recognizing distinctions and common traits among the artists and their works that had earlier gone ignored.

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One of the more fundamental problems involved in considering this work is that it has been so broadly and loosely defined. "Outsider" art and the other terms I mentioned earlier have been applied to such a wide range of artworks that these appellations have been rendered virtually meaningless. The obsessively elaborate doodles of chronic mental patients, the whimsical carvings and kinetic wood toys made by rural craftspeople, the ambitious environmental creations of amateur architects, the African-influenced mojo charms made by some black Southerners—these and other equally diverse kinds of art and artifacts are now routinely lumped together under these vague, interchangeable banners.

To date, the vast majority of exhibits showcasing this art have unquestioningly accepted this generalized view of it and, as a result, have come off as quirky but unfocused rummage-sale-type affairs. There was a time when such exhibits played an important role in stimulating dialogue and introducing the public to a rich variety of artworks that they weren't likely to encounter elsewhere in the institutional art world. But they've outlived their usefulness in that respect. Art audiences across the country and around the world are by now well aware that such works exist. What's needed at this point are more tightly focused shows that yield some fresh insight into these works and highlight aspects other than the "marginal" status of their creators.

In that spirit, this exhibition concentrates on the works of some extraordinary individuals who share in common several key characteristics that set them apart from many others who have been similarly categorized. To begin with, they're all African-Americans. As suggested by the reference to "recycling" in the show's title, they all make frequent and

Ronald Lockett, *Traps* (cat. no. 37) Photo by Marti Griffin

regular use of discarded objects and other found materials in their work. And they're all self-taught, in the sense that they arrived at their distinctive approaches to art-making without the guidance of professional artists, art instructors or prescribed curricula. At the same time, they can't be described as "folk" artists according to the strict definition of that term outlined by folklorists and other academic specialists. In other words, they're not making quilts, baskets, pottery or other utilitarian objects in a style passed on directly from older relatives or neighbors.

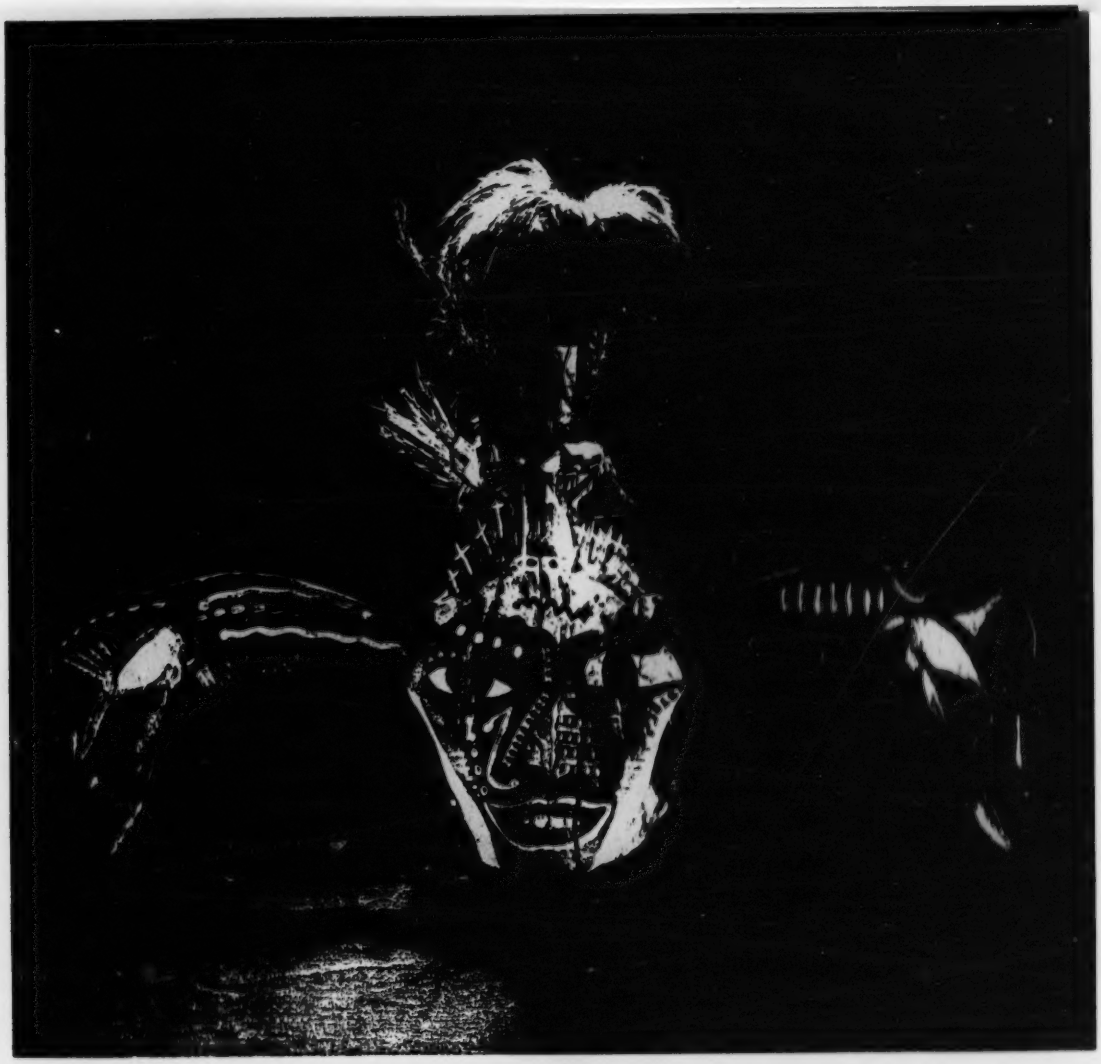
On the other hand, it's not as if these people have simply existed in their own personal vacuums or in imaginary private worlds, as has been the case with some of the artists frequently described as "outsiders." To the contrary, they have all been responsible, productive members of their respective communities, in most cases holding down demanding jobs and caring for families for many years. And it would be grossly inaccurate to describe most of them as being isolated from the larger global-village culture whose midst we all live in; they read books and newspapers, watch the news on TV, and have informed opinions on socio-political issues from the global to the international levels. For all these reasons, the "outsider" tag seems inappropriate and even demeaning when applied to these individuals.

It's unfortunate that the word "visionary" is tossed around with so little discrimination lately. It's applied freely to canny corporate executives, charismatic politicians, brash rock stars and any number of other individuals who have managed to capture the public's attention during their requisite 15 minutes of fame. Despite its appropriation by the mass media as one of our era's favored fuzzy buzzwords, I've chosen to use it here because in its most precise sense, according to one or more of its several overlapping dictionary definitions, it is so strikingly applicable to the artists represented in this exhibit. As an adjective, it means characterized by foresight or vision, in the sense of unusual competence in discernment or perception; it also refers to anyone or anything that has a fantastical or dreamlike nature, or that is otherwise given to apparitions, prophecies or revelations. As a noun, it means seer, prophet or dreamer. These, of course, are the same characteristics by which every traditional culture identifies its wise men and women, its shamans, sorcerers, diviners and healers.

The work of these visionary artists may appear highly idiosyncratic, and it may not be folk art according to the specialists' definition, but it is substantially informed by African-American folk traditions. Indeed, some scholars view these artists as latter-day practitioners of ancient visual and philosophical traditions that have survived and evolved among blacks in the Americas despite four centuries of slavery, oppression, enforced ignorance and second-class citizenship.

Lonnie Holley, *You Can't Replace Real Life* (cat. no. 29)
Photo by Marti Griffin

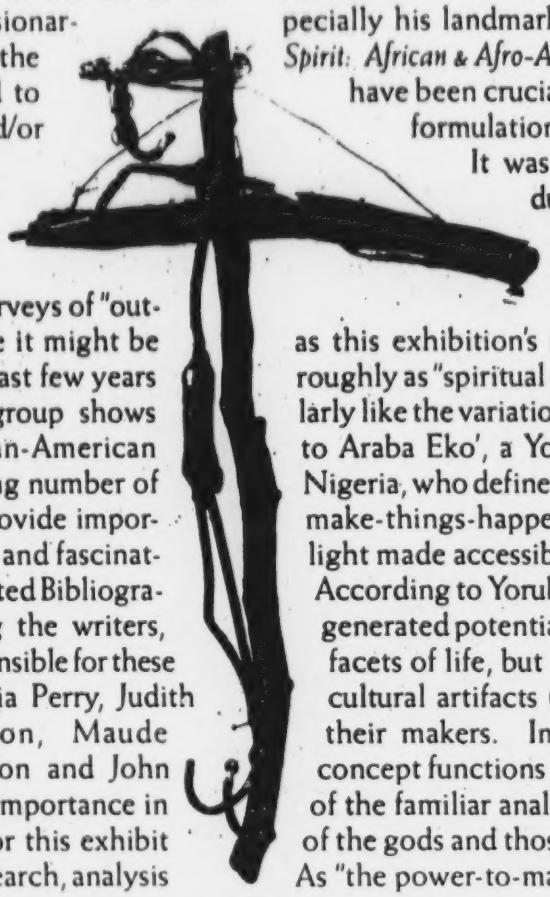
Thornton Dial, *Bird Catcher Lady* (cat. no. 10)
Photo by Marti Griffin



Lonnie Holley, *Trail of Tears* (cat. no. 27) Photo by Richard Hackel

II. Spiritual Command & African Roots

This exhibition and catalog are the first to focus on the interrelated themes of "recycling and improvisation" in the art of self-taught, black American visionaries. But this is by no means the first such project devoted to these particular artists and/or others with whom they share some degree of aesthetic and cultural kinship. In addition to the many wide-ranging surveys of "outsider" art or whatever else it might be called, there have in the past few years been several important group shows concentrating on African-American visionary art and a growing number of articles and books that provide important insights into this rich and fascinating territory (see the Selected Bibliography). Prominent among the writers, scholars and curators responsible for these efforts have been Regenia Perry, Judith McWillie, John Mason, Maude Wahlman, Jane Livingston and John Beardsley. Of particular importance in laying the groundwork for this exhibit has been the extensive research, analysis and commentary that art historian Robert Farris Thompson has contributed to the field of African-American studies. His writings—especially his landmark 1983 book, *Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy*—have been crucial to this show's thematic formulation.



It was Thompson who introduced me (and thousands of other Westerners) to the Yoruba word "*`ashe*," which I've appropriated as this exhibition's main title. It translates roughly as "spiritual command," but I particularly like the variation that Thompson credits to Araba Eko', a Yoruba priest from Lagos, Nigeria, who defined "*`ashe*" as "the power-to-make-things-happen, God's own enabling light made accessible to men and women."[1] According to Yoruba tradition, this divinely generated potential can manifest itself in all facets of life, but our concern here is with cultural artifacts (a.k.a. works of art) and their makers. In that context, the *`ashe* concept functions as an Afrocentric version of the familiar analogy between the powers of the gods and those of the individual artist. As "the power-to-make-things-happen," *`ashe*

Thornton Dial Jr., *Jesus Christ of All the Races* (cat. no. 14)
Photo by Marti Griffin

Bessie Harvey, *African King* (cat. no. 24) Photo by Marti Griffin

is the essence of creative ability—the force that Western culture calls "talent" and often explains as "a gift from God." Which is another way of saying that we don't know where it comes from. Both Western and non-Western traditions tend to agree on the mysterious nature of its origins—that it can be refined and developed in any number of ways, but it can't be learned, that in some fundamental sense explainable only via the supernatural, it is inherent in those who have it. As the late Dilmus Hall once explained it to me in accounting for his own remarkable artistic abilities, "It's a talent that's imbedded in a person. But if it wasn't imbedded in you, you couldn't do it. You got to be imbedded with the talent, and that's from nature. When you can just pick up anything and make somethin' out of it, that's just talent."[2] Like Dilmus Hall, the individuals represented in this exhibit make art because they're "imbedded with the talent," fueled with the spirit of *`ashe*.

On one level this show is about correspondences between these artists' works and objects made by their ancestors in pre-colonial Africa. To a degree, it offers further support for the case already made by Thompson, Perry, McWillie and others, that the work of self-taught black artists in this country constitutes part of an unbroken aesthetic continuum rooted deep in the African past but still evolving in new and surprising ways.[3] For those previously unfamiliar with this view, I'll try to summarize

it here in just a few paragraphs:

Of all the varied cultures forcibly imported to the Americas via the slave trade, the most influential has been that of Kongo, in the western and central parts of sub-Saharan Africa, roughly where present-day Zaire and Angola are located. The Bakongo—as people from this part of the continent are called—accounted for one-fourth to one-third of the slaves brought to the Americas and an even larger percentage of those shipped to the southern part of the United States after 1808.[4] Thompson cites in particular the influences of four major Kongo traditions still evident in African-American culture: "cosmograms marked on the ground for purposes of initiation and mediation of spiritual power between the worlds; the sacred Kongo medicines, or *minkisi*; the use of graves of the recently deceased as charms of ancestral vigilance and spiritual return; and the related supernatural uses of trees, staffs, branches and roots."[5]

These classical African traditions have managed to survive in this country despite seemingly overwhelming odds to the contrary, and they have contributed significantly to the distinct cross-cultural aesthetic manifested in this exhibit.

The cosmograms—ritual drawings that symbolically illustrate traditional Kongo cosmology—take a variety of forms, but the most basic is that of a Greek cross or plus sign tightly enclosed within a circle. *Minkisi* (*nkisi* in the singular) are medicines in the form of sacred charms, "strategic object(s)"[6] fabricated from dirt, leaves, wood, beads, shells, feathers, nails, mirror fragments or any number of other materials used for purposes of healing, protection or the bestowal of good fortune. Symbols strongly resembling Kongo cosmograms are still used in this hemisphere in connection with the rituals of *Vodun*, *Santeria* and other African-American religions, and the *nkisi* tradition survives on this side of the Atlantic in the form of "mojos," love charms and "luck balls," among other manifestations.

As for the other two traditions Thompson mentions, their American counterparts are no doubt fairly obvious to anyone familiar with African-American culture, particularly in the South. In keeping with "the Kongo notion of the tomb as a charm for the persistence of life,"[7] black cemeteries in this country are typically festooned with a wide variety of found objects intended not merely to ornament the graves but to enhance their inherent powers and protect the spirits of the dead. As in many other cultures, trees are traditional Kongo symbols of the spirit, their roots descending into the underworld while their branches reach upward into the heavens, and this is why they are sometimes planted on graves in the Kongo region and in some of this country's black cemeteries. Related to this symbolism and to similar Kongo practices is the longstanding African-American tradition

of placing bottles on the limbs of trees or tree-like wood frameworks as a means of supernatural protection against evil. Such bottle trees aren't as common as they were 30 and more years ago, but examples of the tradition can still be seen in some rural areas in the American South.

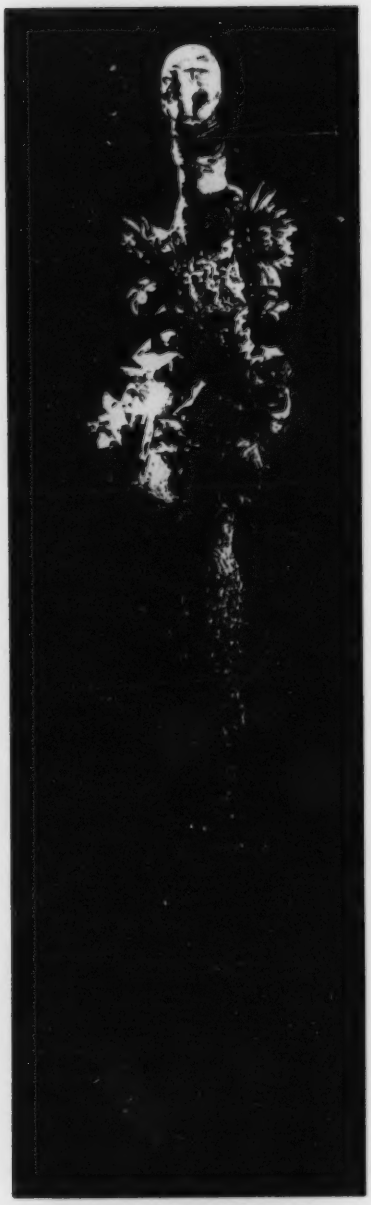
Tree branches and roots also serve important symbolic and ritual functions, whether in their natural state or elaborated with imagery and transformed into staffs and other ritual devices. One of the most popular African-American charms is a small, twisted root known as "High John the Conqueror."[8] Such objects are traditionally associated with intensely concentrated supernatural power, in accordance with the Kongo belief that potent spirits called *bisimbi* are incarnate in gnarled and twisted root formations.

An important link in the evolution of traditional black art forms from the spiritually functional artifacts of classical Kongo culture to the creations of these late-20th- century African-Americans is the yard show. To the untrained eye, a yard show is simply a collection of ordinary objects—old car tires, hubcaps, mirrors, empty jars and bottles, toy dolls, stones or other items—arranged and displayed in the area immediately surrounding a house. But to one who knows the Kongo references, it exemplifies "an independent African-American aesthetic of immense consequence and influence," whereby the most humble house dwelling and its surrounding property can be transformed into "virtually one vast *nkisi* charm."[9]

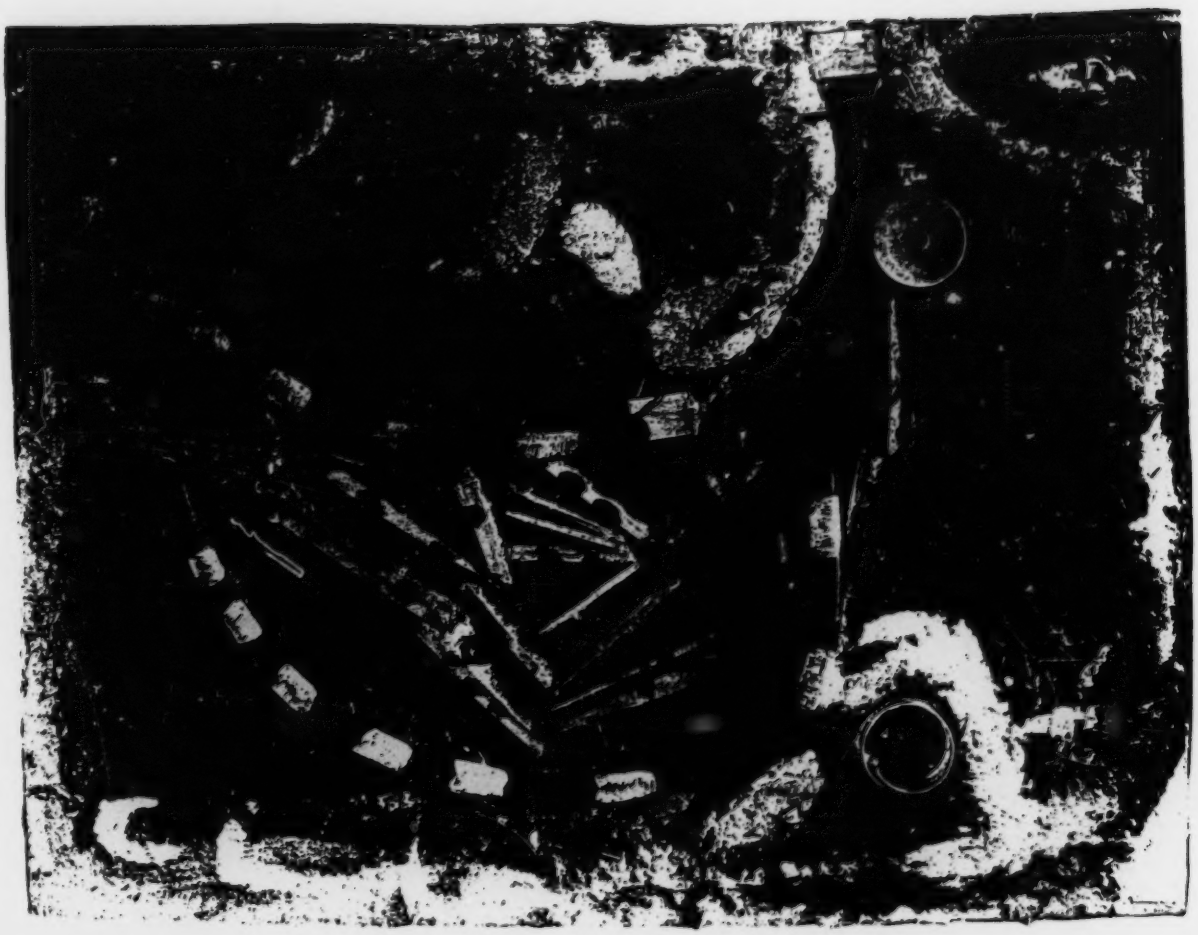
Most if not all of the artists featured in this exhibit have created yard shows—quite elaborate ones in a few cases—and some of the works here have been directly excerpted from such slapdash domestic displays. There are pieces here that invite comparison to cosmograms, bottle trees, cemetery charms and other *minkisi*. Others incorporate twisted roots or oddly shaped wood formations that recall the *bisimbi* tradition.

These comparisons aren't intended to suggest that the artists are working from direct knowledge of these African precedents, nor that there's some kind of unconscious genetic cultural memory operating here. The point is, rather, that these classical African traditions are so strong and adaptable that they've managed to survive in this country—albeit minus their original names—despite seemingly overwhelming odds to the contrary. This heritage has in turn contributed significantly to the distinct cross-cultural aesthetic manifested in this exhibition.

Bessie Harvey, *Creation is a Burst of All Colors*
(cat. no. 23) Photo by Richard Hackel



Thomas Jefferson Bowman, decorated cane
(cat. no. 7) Photo by Richard Hackel



Charlie Lucas, *The Duck* (cat. no. 42) Photo by Richard Hackel

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III. Something Out of Nothing

While living in Atlanta during the late 1970s and early '80s, I had the pleasure of meeting the late Nellie Mae Rowe and occasionally visiting her at her small clapboard house, located on the northwest edge of the city in a community called Vinings. Her yard, the garden and both the interior and exterior of her home were lovingly ornamented with broken plastic toys, artificial fruit, religious memorabilia, bells, beads, plaster figurines, imitiation birds in cages and myriad other decorative and utilitarian objects, along with many examples of her varied but distinctive artwork—drawings, paintings, collages, found object constructions, hand-colored photographs of herself and her friends, homemade dolls wearing thrift-store clothes and pairs of her old glasses, and oddly shaped bits of lumber painted to resemble fish or animals.

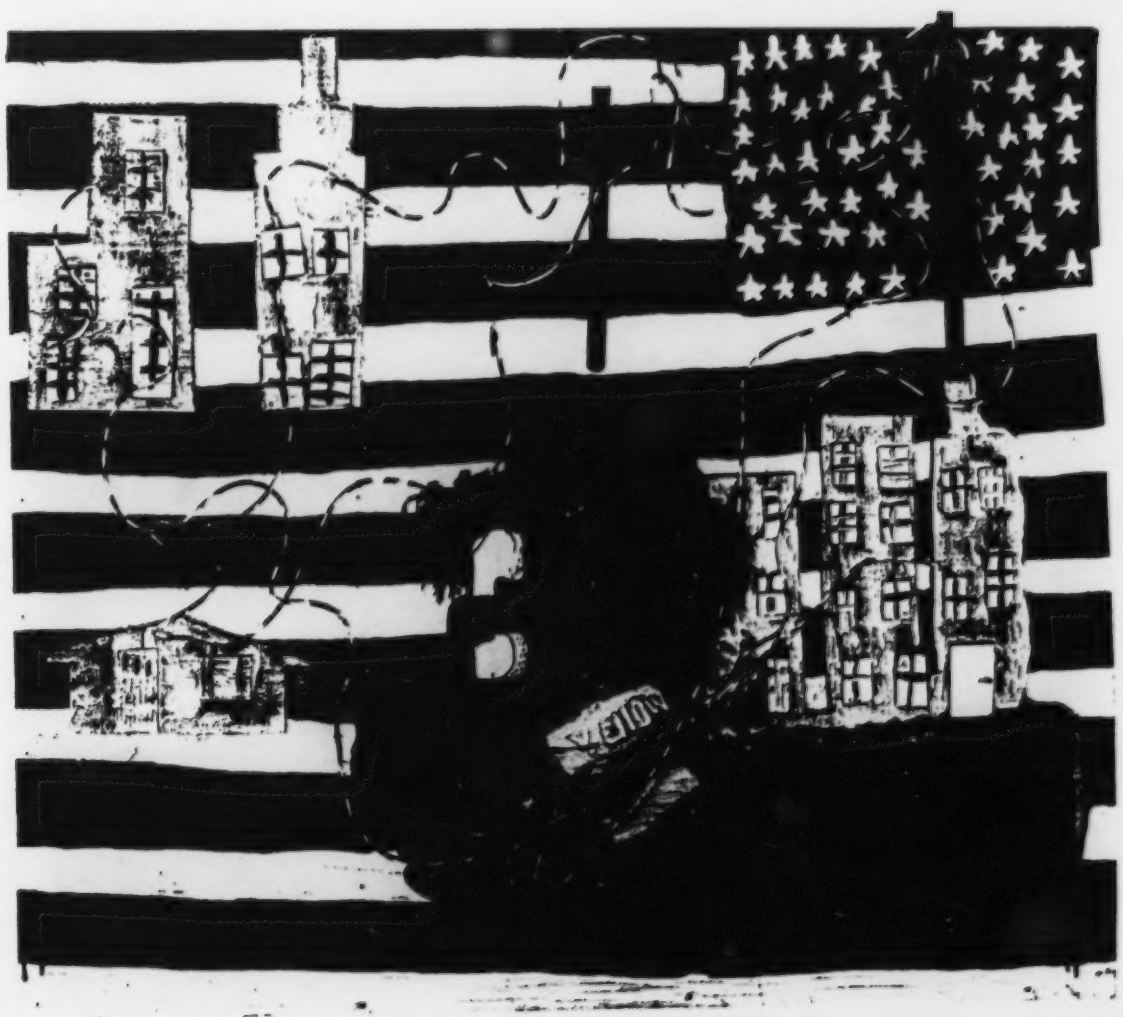
To some degree, this work represents a cross-cultural tradition parallel to that of the Modernists. In fact, this African-American tradition preceded its Euro-American counterpart.

During an interview I conducted with her not long before her death in 1982, she gave eloquent expression to the recycling impulse that is a focal point of this exhibition: "I take nothin' and make somethin' out of it," she told me. "When other peoples have somethin' they don't know what to do with, they throw it away. But not me. I'm gonna make somethin' out of it. Ever since I was a child I been that way." As an example, she showed me one of her chewing-gum sculptures—a softball-size head formed largely of pre-chewed spearmint gum and embellished with bright paint, costume jewelry and bits of cloth—and explained, "Whenever I take a notion, I chews gum, but I save it when I'm through. My mind says, 'You're buyin' it and throwin' it right down,' so I says, 'I'm gonna make me somethin' out of it.'"[10]

Like the artists represented here, Rowe grew up in a family of very modest means and among people who could ill afford letting anything go to waste. What we have in recent years come to call "recycling" has always been practiced among the world's poor, wherever they might live. Material resourcefulness and conservation are essential survival skills for those who have little, whether they be black, white, brown, yellow or red. In most traditional cultures, such skills are associated with common sense and wisdom.

At first glance, many of the pieces in this exhibit might suggest a conceptual relationship to the 20th- century Euro-American art traditions of assemblage and the found object, bringing to mind earlier works by Duchamp, Braque, Picasso, Jean Tinguely, Edward Keinholz and Robert Rauschenberg. But these black visionaries are generally unaware of and uninfluenced by those avante-gardists and other "mainstream" artists, and their use of found objects and materials springs from different motivations than those behind Duchamp's readymades, for example, or Keinholz's tableaux. To some degree, the work here represents a cross-cultural tradition parallel to that of the Modernists and their academically trained successors. In fact, this African-American tradition preceded its Euro-American counterpart. As Judith McWillie has pointed out, "...even before Derain, Matisse, and Picasso began to unfix the classical boundaries of Western imagination and form, blacks in the Americas were synthesizing African, European, and Native American idioms to create non-objective assemblages and narrative improvisations that prefigured the aesthetic revolutions to come..."[11]

On a purely material level, the works exhibited here exemplify what anthropologist Juilius S. Kassovic has termed "folk recycling," a virtually universal tradition among the economically disadvantaged, whereby "junked and industrially-produced items are somehow reworked to produce 'new' items performing altered functions."[12] In most cases the end products of this widespread practice are strictly utilitarian. But certain black visionary artists have raised this tradition to a more profound level, at which the most mundane materials are infused with religious, philosophical and moral significance, functioning as components in complex narrative, educational, devotional or protective devices. Remarking on these artists' "extraordinary gift for reconfiguring ordinary objects," Grey Gundaker has related their work to the traditional African religious concept of "double sight"—the ability to perceive and operate within the material and spiritual realms simultaneously—and has described its creation as a kind of "mediating translation,"[13] through which the junk and debris of everyday life is resurrected and transformed into an open-ended series of spiritual object-lessons. In terms of their working processes, these artists use found objects the way a jazz player employs musical notes and scales, improvising with them to create dazzling juxtapositions and transcendent constellations of freely ranging form and deep meaning.



Thornton Dial Jr., *The Gorilla Lends a Helping Hand to the United States and the Telephone Company* (cat. no. 13)
Photo by Marti Griffin

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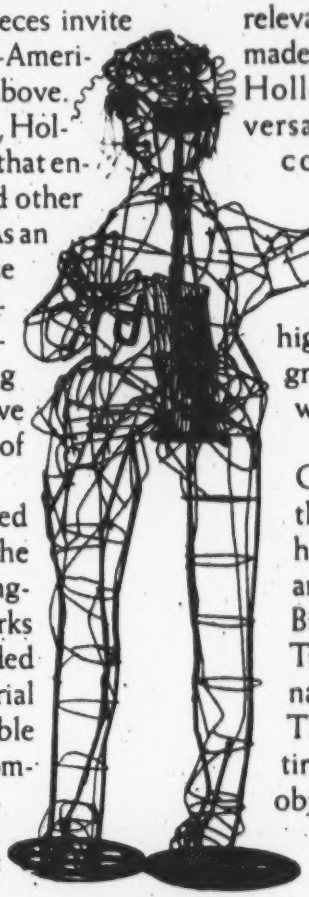
Thornton Dial, *Sanctified Dancing* (cat. no. 8) Photo by Gamma One Conversions

IV. Contemporary Art Beyond the Mainstream

Lonnie Holley's one-acre environmental assemblage on the outskirts of Birmingham, Alabama, is an exceptionally dynamic, ambitious example of the black yard-show tradition, and his freestanding pieces invite comparison to other African-American visual models discussed above. As for his use of found objects, Holley grew up in circumstances that encouraged "folk recycling" and other forms of material ingenuity. As an adult, he has sharpened these skills to a fine art, which he explains in terms befitting a latter-day alchemist: "I dig through what other people have thrown away...to get the gold of it..."[14]

Like the densely cluttered garden of resurrected junk he has built on the edge of Birmingham, Holley's individual works are richly symbolic and loaded with meaning. His industrial sandstone carvings and portable found-object constellations comment on a wide range of contemporary issues, from the Los Angeles riots to the plight of Native Americans to the U.S. health-care crisis. These works hold their own, without reference to Holley's heritage or biography, alongside the most conceptually focused, politically relevant, formally sophisticated art now being made by academically trained artists. Holley is simply a brilliant, endlessly versatile and astonishingly prolific contemporary artist, period. And in contrast to the stereotypical aging, eccentric, isolated "outsider," he is still relatively young (42 at this writing), culturally informed, highly articulate and well aware of his work's growing status in the contemporary art world.



Charlie Lucas, *Time Man* (cat. no. 39)
Photo by Marti Griffin

At 41, Holley's friend and colleague Charlie Lucas is also considerably younger than most of the self-taught artists who have been "discovered" by the institutional art world. While Holley is known around Birmingham as "the Sandman," Lucas is "the Tin Man" to his neighbors in the poetically named community of Pink Lily, Alabama. This tag was inspired by his frequent use of tin and other scrap metal materials and objects in making art. Working with bailing wire, metal bands, automobile parts, broken tools and the innards of dis-

carded radios and TV sets, Lucas creates large-scale sculptural assemblages in the form of people, animals and airplanes. A number of these works populate the field adjoining the artist's house (which he also built), like sentinels standing guard over him and his family.

Lucas also makes paintings, and in this respect at least he is without precedent among his forebearers, family members and neighbors. But his work in welded scrap-metal was prefigured by his great-grandfather Caine King Jackson, a blacksmith who, as Lucas recalls, "did metal sculpture with left-over stuff that he had. He molded it, re-shaped it, beat it out."[15] Does this mean that Lucas—unlike most of the other individuals represented here—is a *bona fide* traditional folk artist? I'll leave the folklife specialists to argue among themselves over that question. More important is the fact that Lucas is making vital, contemporary sculptural statements. His art may not confront the charged social issues dealt with in the art of Lonnie Holley, Thornton Dial and a few others represented in this show, but in a formal sense as well as in its exploration of personal, psychological concerns, it is strong, significant work.

These works hold their own alongside the most conceptually focused, politically relevant, formally sophisticated art now being made by academically trained artists.

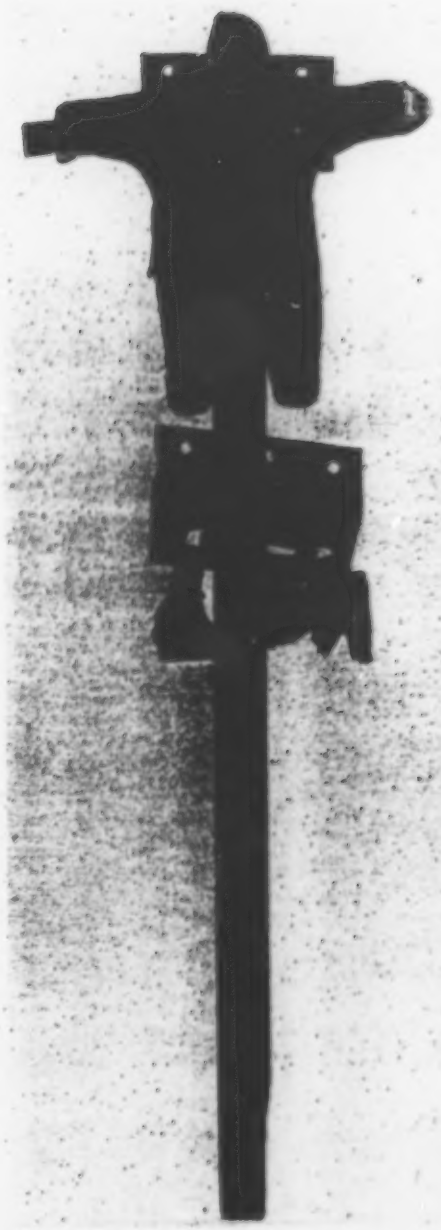
Just as Lucas' rusting metal sculptures guard his domain in southern Alabama, the yard of Hawkins Bolden in Memphis, Tennessee, is watched over by a constantly changing assembly of loosely structured figures made from sticks of broken furniture, carpet scraps, discarded kitchenware, castoff clothing and other items Bolden finds in the vacant lots and alleyways of his inner-city neighborhood. Now 77 years old, he is unique among contemporary artists in that he has been blind since the age of seven and relies entirely on his sense of touch to construct his figures and the wind-triggered noise-making devices that share the area bordering his vegetable garden. These "sentinels" clearly function as more than mere scarecrows, as indicated by their number and by comments the artist has made in reference to the buckets and other metal vessels that often serve as heads for these figurative constructions: "I make eyes on them," he explains. "I make them so they can see good: two eyes here, and one way up on the top of the head. The third eye sees a whole lot, you know."[16]

Remarking on examples of Bolden's work that appeared in a 1990 group exhibition at the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Lowery Sims marveled "at the parallels between this work and the occult apparitions of Jim Dine, whose self-portrait was symbolized in diagrams of his housecoat during the 1960s."[17] Although much more abbreviated, Bolden's pieces also have a lot in common with

the life-size "Masked Figures" that the Anglo-American sculptor David Finn exhibited in the alleys and deserted buildings of Lower Manhattan during the 1980s.

The late Ralph Griffin originally made his found-wood sculptures to place in his yard in Girard, Georgia, where they functioned as guardian figures in an environment that also incorporated painted stones and gardens. Just as Lonnie Holley and Charlie Lucas were nicknamed according to their favored materials, Griffin was known in his community as "the Root Man" because of the anthropomorphic transformations he worked on roots and other gnarled and twisted tree fragments that he gathered from a streambed on his property and from nearby cemeteries.

Griffin began creating his sculptures in the 1970s, about the same time that Bessie Harvey commenced work on her ongoing series of strikingly similar pieces fashioned from driftwood and other found objects. Then as now, Harvey lived in Alcoa, Tennessee, several hundred miles from Girard, Georgia, and the two artists had no way of knowing about each other until almost a decade later. Her root figures are typically more elaborate than Griffin's—more thoroughly painted and liberally augmented with putty, costume jewelry, glitter, shells or artificial flowers—and in recent years she has added ceramics, metal sculpture and two-dimensional painting to her repertoire.



Hawkins Bolden, untitled construction (cat. no. 4)
Photo by Marti Griffin

Regarding her use of found materials, Harvey echoes the comments of other artists represented here, saying "Whatever other people throw away, that's what's good for me to work with."[18] And her art is motivated by the same kind of insistent visionary consciousness that has inspired many other self-taught artists: "Some nights I close my eyes to go to sleep," she explained, "and there will appear on my eyelids a vision of one of these dolls. It won't go away, and I have to get up and draw it out on paper or get a piece of wood and start making it."[19]

A similar sense of urgency drove the late Juanita Rogers to create hundreds of distinctive sculptures in the form of fantastic human-animal hybrids. Instead of twisted roots and branches like those used by Griffin and Harvey, Rogers created her works from other equally ordinary materials that she found in or near her yard outside Montgomery, Alabama. Cow and mule bones, broken glass, fossil shells, cinders, Spanish moss and even coffee grounds are among the ingredients she added to the raw, reddish, iron-rich mud that was her main sculptural material.

Rogers is remembered in the art world primarily for her somewhat more conventional watercolors of expressionistically rendered cartoon characters in rural settings, often with mysterious spaceships hovering in the sky. One of these works was even posthumously featured on the cover of an album by the popular rock group R.E.M. But she was apparently more serious about and devoted to "making mud,"[20] as she referred to her sculpting process. A few years before Rogers' death, her friend and the principal collector of her work, Anton Haardt, wrote that Rogers approached her "mud work" with "an unwavering sense of mission"—that she created sculptures "because she feels it is her duty, her job."[21] According to Haardt, Rogers claimed she was compelled to make these pieces by a man she alternately called Stonefish or Stoneface, apparently an imaginary figure. Her sculptures depict dogs, cats, "graveyard ants" and creatures she called "Mermaids, Goat-men, Ram-men and Jungle women with tails,"[22] and when questioned about them, she replied enigmatically, "This is Secret Service work—Stonefish, he can tell you more about it than me, 'cause I don't know much about it. I just make it."[23]

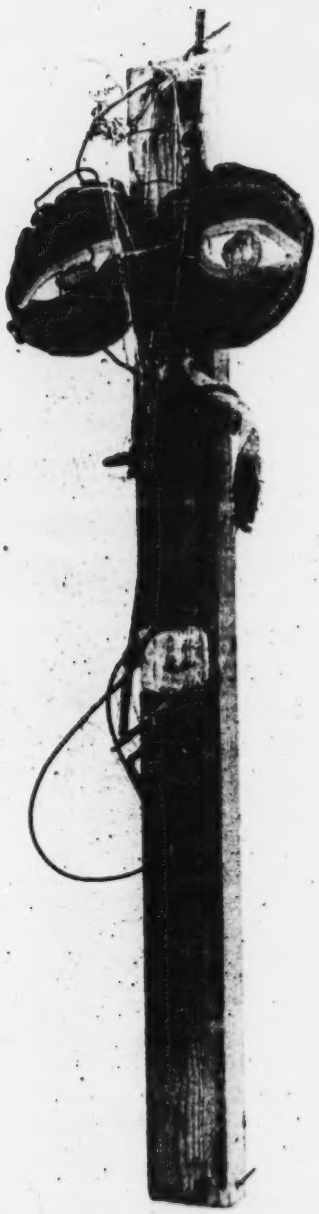
Ralph Griffin said he made art simply because "I just want to see what I can find in these roots and things."[24] Bessie Harvey downplays the art status of her sculptures by calling them "dolls." And Juanita Rogers deflected inquiries into the nature of her work by

invoking a mysterious entity perceivable to no one else. Unfamiliar and unconcerned with the specialized language and intellectual conventions of contemporary art discourse, self-taught artists have been known to speak of their work in terms deliberately aimed at confounding the listener or understating the work's real significance. This is particularly common in cases of black artists responding to questions from writers, scholars and collectors who happen to be white. Cultural subterfuge is itself a necessary folk tradition among black Americans, who long ago learned how to conceal their own strengths and otherwise be strategic in their dealings with whites—to play it cool, play dumb, disguise their motives, hide the truth—whatever it took to protect themselves and their traditions from the keepers of the dominant racist culture. Writing about the work of Thornton Dial, the late Robert Bishop attributed the artist's "long-maintained secrecy about his work" in part to "his fear of reprisals from uninformed whites and blacks who might misunderstand and resent his social commentary. He avoided talking about the nature of his art to outsiders, claiming simply that 'it don't mean nothing.'"[25]

Dial's is a highly interesting case in this regard. For more than 40 years he created artworks that were seen only by his family and his neighbors in Bessemer, Alabama, meanwhile making his living at a variety of construction-related jobs and other blue-collar trades.

Juanita Rogers, Dog with Tongue
Photo by Anton Haardt

Juanita Rogers, Headless Woman (cat. no. 47)
Photo by Anton Haardt



Lonnie Holley, *The Eyes of the Labor Man* (cat. no. 31)
Photo by Marti Griffin

26

"Discovered" by the art world during the "outsider" art boom of the 1980s, Dial quickly gained a reputation as one of the country's most creative and prolific self-taught artists. Encouraged by the keen interest that others have shown in his work in recent years, he is no longer secretive about it, and he now asserts, "Too many people died without ever getting their mind out to the world. I have found how to get my ideas out and I won't stop."[26]

Like the other artists represented here, Dial often works with found materials, which he incorporates into his art in ways that are sometimes so subtle that they go unnoticed. He has used scrap metal, scrap carpet, unwound braided rugs, discarded architectural components, soft-drink bottles, a pair of crutches and myriad other castoffs in making his intensely expressionistic narrative sculptures and paintings. Drawing from a rich vocabulary of personal symbols, he uses his work as a vehicle for social criticism and commentary on a variety of political, psychological and spiritual issues, including race relations, the environment, corporate exploitation, drug abuse, religion and sexuality. Inspired by his formidable example, several other members of Dial's family have begun making art in recent years, and two of them—son Thornton Jr. and cousin Ronald Lockett—are also represented in this exhibit.

Dial's bold artistic statements have made a strong impression in the critical arena as well

as the marketplace, where his more ambitious pieces have established record prices for new work by a living, self-taught artist. But his commercial success has been a sore point for some observers of the "outsider" market, who seem troubled by the fact that works by an uneducated black Southerner could command the same five-figure prices routinely fetched by younger, trendier, white, academically trained New York artists.[27] This attitude reveals a deep-seated, ultimately Eurocentric (and SoHocentric) prejudice about the nature of art and education.

Countering this view in a recent issue of the *New Art Examiner*, Butler Hancock offers a more appropriate perspective on this subject when he cautions, "The fact that some of these artists may have had little formal education, lived in relative isolation, faced monumental racism and poverty, or been inspired by personal religious convictions should not be the critical or categorical focus of their work.... We should approach their backgrounds as references that tell us how they got where they are today: making important contemporary art."[28]

Current debates about the value and validity of self-taught art reflect the generally unsettled state of the American art scene during an important transitional phase. Despite the distintively American developments of the past 75 years or so, the visual arts in this country have in many ways continued to follow a basically European model that is increasingly irrelevant to our larger societal circumstances. But just as some semblance of a "New World Order" is beginning to take shape in the realm of geopolitics and international economics, so is a kind of New Art-World Order emerging on the American cultural front. Among its other aspects, this emergence involves a new openness to and eagerness for the creative contributions of African-, Hispanic-, Asian-, and Native Americans, along with those of other racial and cultural groups once considered to be "outside the mainstream."

The mainstream doesn't exist anymore. The aesthetic and intellectual priorities that American visual art inherited from Europe no longer comprise the dominant agenda in the postmodern, pluralistic, multicultural milieu that is the current art world. This fact is just beginning to be acknowledged and addressed by the institutions charged with administering culture in this country. It's a slow process, but one in which the artists represented here are playing a significant role. Just as they give new meaning to the castoff materials they scavenge, so are they revitalizing and reinvigorating the contemporary art scene with their innovatively improvisational, thought-provoking work. Consistently bold, experimental and adventurous, it transmits important lessons about self-empowerment, community empowerment and the transformational powers of art.

Footnotes

[1]Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy* (New York: Vintage Books/Random House, 1983) p.5.

[2]Tom Patterson, "A Strange & Beautiful World," *Brown's Guide to Georgia*, Vol. 9, No. 12 (December 1981) p. 58.

[3]This argument is most comprehensively supported in Robert Farris Thompson's *Flash of the Spirit* (see Note 1, above) and further elaborated in the following exhibition catalogs: *Another Face of the Diamond: Pathways Through the Black Atlantic South* (New York: INTAR Latin American Gallery, 1989) ; *Black Art/Ancestral Legacy: The African Impulse in African-American Art* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 1989) ; *Even the Deep Things of God: A Quality of Mind in Afro-Atlantic Traditional Art* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, 1990) ; and *Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi/Center for the Study of Southern Culture/Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1982).

[4]Judith McWillie, "Introduction," p. 5, and Robert Farris Thompson, "The Circle and the Branch: Renascent Kongo-American Art," p. 24, *Another Face of the Diamond* (see Note 3, above).

[5]Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, p. 108.

[6]Ibid, p. 117.

[7]Ibid, p. 132.

[8]Ibid, p. 131.

[9]Robert Farris Thompson, "The Song that Named the Land: The Visionary Presence of African-American Art," *Black Art/Ancestral Legacy* (see Note 3, above) p. 124.

[10]Tom Patterson, "A Strange & Beautiful World," p. 53.

[11]Judith McWillie, "Introduction, " *Another Face of the Diamond*, p. 7.

[12]Julius Stephen Kassovic, "Junk and its Transformations," *A Report from the Center for Folk Art and Contemporary Crafts*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1992) p. 1.

[13]Grey Gundaker, "Double Sight," *Even the Deep Things of God* (see Note 3, above).

[14]Judith McWillie, "Lonnie Holley's Moves," *Artforum*, Vol. XXX, No. 8 (April 1992) p. 81.

[15]*Another Face of the Diamond*, p. 64.

[16]Ibid, p. 61.

[17] Lowery S. Sims, "On Notions of the Decade, African-Americans and the Art World," *Next Generation: Southern Black Aesthetic* (Winston-Salem: Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, 1990) p. 11.

[18]Self-promotional/information sheet distributed by the artist, 1992.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Quoted by Anton Haardt, "Juanita Rogers," pamphlet distributed by Anton Haardt Studio, Montgomery, AL, 1982.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Ibid.

[24]*Even the Deep Things of God*, p. 11.

[25]Robert Bishop, "Thornton Dial: An Ordinary and Unique American Artist," *Thornton Dial: Strategy of the World* (Jamaica: Southern Queens Park Association, 1990) p. 3.

[26]Paul Arnett, "The Strategy of Thornton Dial," *Thornton Dial: Strategy of the World*, p. 9.

[27]Phyllis Joyner and Gerard Haggerty, "Folk Art at Fancy Prices: The Case of Thornton Dial Sr.," *Folk Art Messenger*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Spring 1990) p. 1-3. See also "Dial Story Raises Tempers," a response to the Joyner/Haggerty article in the form of a letter written by Ben Apfelbaum (and Haggerty's response to Apfelbaum's response), *Folk Art Messenger*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Summer 1990) p. 2.

[28]Butler Hancock, "The designation of indifference, " *New Art Examiner*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (October 1992) p. 22.

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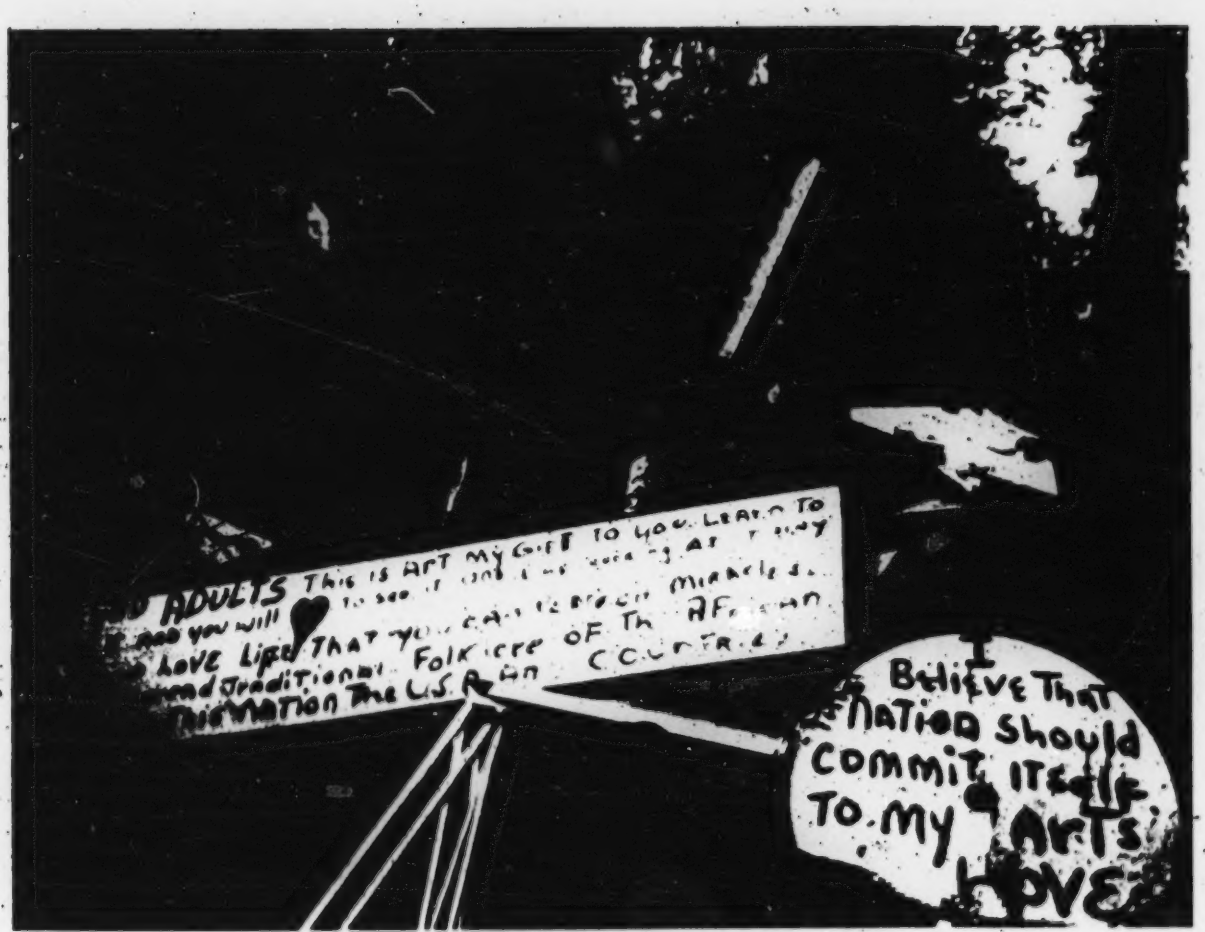

Hand-painted signs at entrance to Lonnie Holley's environment, Birmingham, Alabama, October, 1992.
Photo by Tom Patterson

Juanita Rogers, 1982. Photo by Anton Haardt

THE ARTISTS

E.M. BAILEY (1903-1986) *was born and spent his childhood in rural Georgia near the small town of Indian Springs. In 1916 he moved to Atlanta, where he lived until his death. During his last 40 years he earned a living fabricating cement tombstones. Around 1960 he began making art as "something to do in my spare time, to keep busy." In the ensuing years he created dozens of paintings, sculptures and other works, which he displayed in every room of his house and in an adjacent outdoor environment that doubled as a vegetable garden. His work ranges from commemorative portraits to religious scenes to personal narrative art and social commentary.*

HAWKINS BOLDEN (b. 1915) *lost his eyesight at age seven following a blow to the head, and never regained it, but he has made visual/tactile art for most of his life. Bolden gathers a variety of discarded objects during his rounds as a gardener and clean-up man in urban Memphis, Tennessee, and uses them to construct the scarecrows, guardian figures and abstract assemblages that until a few years ago could only be seen in his yard.*

THOMAS JEFFERSON BOWMAN (c. 1915-c. 1980) *lived in Pinehurst, North Carolina, and was a railroad worker for most of his life. He used dolls, Christmas ornaments, costume jewelry and other found objects to make and decorate walking canes and other artworks. His most elaborate project was the ornamentation of his car, which he transformed into such an arresting sight that it caused traffic jams when he drove it through his hometown, and he was ticketed by local police as a result.*

THORNTON DIAL (b. 1928) *spent his childhood in rural Sumter County, Alabama, before moving at age 13 to the nearby industrial town of Bessemer. He worked for many*

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years at a local railroad-car manufacturing plant and a variety of part-time jobs, including carpentry, house-painting and metal work. Meanwhile he devoted his spare time to making sculpture, paintings and other artworks that few people saw until about six years ago. Dial uses a surprising array of conventional and unconventional materials, including industrial scraps and found objects, to create distinctive, restlessly experimental works that address social, philosphical and personal issues.

THORNTON DIAL, JR. (b. 1953) is one of several members of Thornton Dial's family who have followed in his footsteps (see also Ronald Lockett, below). In 1984, with his father and younger brother Richard, he helped establish a family business, Dial Metal Patterns, in which he continues to work making outdoor furniture. Meanwhile, like the senior Dial before him, he devotes much of his spare time to making art, often from industrial scraps and other castoff materials that he finds near his home in Bessemer, Alabama.

RALPH GRIFFIN (1925-1992) was born in Burke County, Georgia, and lived his entire life in that state's southeastern coastal plain, working as a janitor and at a variety of other jobs. With his wife Loretta, he settled in the rural community of Girard and raised six children. About 15 years before his death he began scavenging roots and weathered tree stumps and using red, black and white paint to transform them into anthropomorphic sculptures that he placed in his yard and later sold to art collectors and dealers across the country.

BESSIE HARVEY (b. 1928) was born in Dallas, Georgia, and currently lives in Alcoa, Tennessee. A great grandmother with 30 grandchildren and 11 children whom she raised almost entirely by herself, she began making sculpture about 20 years ago and was "discovered" by the contemporary art world in the early 1980s. Usually made of twisted tree fragments augmented with paint, jewelry, feathers, shells and artificial flowers, these figure-based works have strong affinities with traditional African and African-American art as well as with the work of certain self-taught and academically trained contemporaries.

LONNIE HOLLEY (b. 1950) was in his early teens when his grandmother taught him to scavenge in trash dumps for items he could sell at secondhand shops and flea markets. About a dozen years ago he began carving blocks of industrial sandstone—waste from a steel mill in his hometown of Birmingham, Alabama—to form sculpture echoing the art of ancient Africa and Mesoamerica. Soon he added painting, wire sculpture and found object assemblage to his artistic repertoire, and in recent years he has transformed the wooded hillside surrounding his house into a densely cluttered environment whose constantly changing juxtapositions of artifacts and images convey interrelated messages about spiritual and psychological issues as well as socio-political concerns.

JOE LIGHT (b. 1934) was born in Dyersburg, Tennessee, and spent much of his troubled youth traveling around the South. After a brief stint in the army during the early 1950s, he had several run-ins with the law, and he was in and out of jail from the mid-'50s until the late '60s. After converting to Judaism during his last prison term, he settled in Memphis, where he married and raised seven children, whom he supported by working as a barber and a dealer in secondhand goods. He also began making sculpture from driftwood and other found objects, and a few years later he started painting bold landscapes and figures on plywood panels. He first exhibited these works in his yard along with handpainted signs bearing religious and socio-political messages.

RONALD LOCKETT (b. 1965), the youngest artist represented in this exhibit, is a young cousin of Thornton Dial (see biographical note above) and lives near the rest of the Dial family in Bessemer, Alabama. As a child he watched Dial making sculptures and paintings and was thus inspired to take up art himself. He considered entering art school after his graduation from high school in the early

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1980s, but instead decided to remain at home working on his own and continuing to learn from Dial. His work often incorporates recycled materials and otherwise shows clear signs of Dial's influence, but he has developed his own signature style and a unique vocabulary of symbols and visual motifs.

CHARLIE LUCAS (b. 1951) may have inherited his creative and mechanical abilities from his father, who was a chauffeur and auto mechanic, and from other forebears skilled at such trades as blacksmithing and chair-caning. One of 14 children growing up in rural Jefferson County, Alabama, he ran away from home in his early teens and learned to support himself as a construction worker, truck-driver and handyman. In the early 1970s he married and settled in Autauga, Alabama, where he continues to live with his wife and six children. During his childhood he made toys from scrap materials, and many years later, when he was a husband and father, he began making scrap-metal sculpture while recuperating from a back injury.

LEROY PERSON (1907-1985) was a sawmill worker and carpenter who dealt with illiteracy by devising his own private hieroglyphic system, which only he and members of his family could read. He built the small wood-frame house where he lived for most of his life near Jackson, North Carolina, and after his retirement in the 1970s, he covered the door and window frames with complex networks of carved glyphs and abstract shapes. Using scrap lumber and other found wood objects, he made furniture and hundreds of small wood sculptures which he colored with the wax from melted crayons.

JUANITA ROGERS (1934-1985) lived her entire life in rural southern Alabama near Montgomery, and she began making mud sculpture during her childhood. She never married or had children, and she spent the last 13 years of her life in a two-room house with no plumbing. Aside from a few sticks of furniture and a TV set that usually remained on, this small dwelling was filled with her sculptures, which she claimed were inspired by and made for a mysterious, probably imaginary figure known as Stonefish or Stone-face. Rogers also made fanciful narrative watercolors of hovering spacecraft and cartoon characters.

ARTHUR SPAIN (1931-1978) spent most of his life in Raleigh, North Carolina. There he produced many distinctive variations on the traditional folk art form of bottle construction, filling whiskey bottles with miniature figures and crosses that he carved from scrap wood and decorated with glitter and ballpoint pen drawings. He usually sold these or traded them for full bottles of whiskey. The only examples of his work on permanent public display are at Marvin Johnson's Kennebec Gourd Museum near Fuquay-Varina, N.C.

JIMMIE LEE SUDDUTH (b. 1910) began painting at age three and was encouraged to continue pursuing this art form by his mother, a Native American "medicine lady." Having no access to traditional art materials, he taught himself to paint with his fingers, using mixtures of mud, sugar, honey, berries and other plant materials on scrap wood surfaces, and he has continued to work primarily with these same kinds of materials. While making art and performing music on his harmonica for the amusement of his family and neighbors, he earned his living working on farms, grinding corn meal and even working as a carnival roustabout. His reputation as an artist began to spread after his first solo exhibit, 21 years ago at the Fayette Art Museum in his native Fayette County, Alabama.

The Curator

TOM PATTERSON is a writer, art critic and curator. He is the author of *St. EOM in the Land of Pasaquan* (Jargon Society, 1987) and *Howard Finster, Stranger From Another World* (Abbeville Press, 1989). He writes regularly for the *Charlotte Observer* and the *Winston-Salem Journal*.

Exhibition Checklist

LENDERS TO THE EXHIBITION

William Arnett • Cavin-Morris Gallery • Mr. & Mrs. Richard Craven • Robert Cargo Folk Art Gallery • Lew Deadmore • Pensy Demetriades • Anton Haarat Gallery • Lonnie Holley • A. Everett James • Robert Lynch Collection of Outsider Art, North Carolina Wesleyan College • Roger Manley • Su Peterson • Mike and Lisa Eller Smith • Howard Smith • Urban Artware Gallery

E.M. BAILEY

1. *Pyramid*, mid-1970s
plastic beads, coins, rocks, jewelry, buttons, plaster, wood; 11" x 12 3/4" x 12 1/2"
Collection of William Arnett

2. Untitled, date unknown
aluminum foil, plastic foliage, rocks, branches with leaves, plastic toy animals, terrycloth, plaster, spray paint, wood frame; 23" x 27" x 5 1/2"
Collection of William Arnett

HAWKINS BOLDEN

3. Untitled, 1980s
decorative cookie tin lid, aluminum pot, carpet, tree branch; 32" x 15" x 9 1/2"
Collection of William Arnett

4. Untitled, 1980s
tin lids, found metal, plastic, synthetic leather, wood, fabric (child's snow suit); 88 1/2" x 29 1/2" x 8 1/2"
Collection of William Arnett

5. Untitled, 1980s
painted wood bed headboard, found metal objects, wire fencing, upholstery fabric, foam backing; 41" x 33" x 5"
Collection of William Arnett

6. Untitled, 1980s
wood, plastic, aluminum pot, artificial greenery; 79" x 13 1/2" x 10"
Collection of William Arnett

THOMAS JEFFERSON BOWMAN

7. Decorated cane, ca. mid-1970s
wood, plastic, sequins, artificial foliage, ribbon, tinsel, mirror glass, plastic flowers, aluminum foil, barbed wire, yarn, string and found paper advertisements; 40" x 1 1/2" x 18"
Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Richard Craven

THORNTON DIAL

8. *Sanctified Dancing*, 1992
enamel, wood, wire screen, carpet, clothing, barbed wire, industrial sealing compound on canvas mounted on wood; 72" x 84 1/2" x 4"
Collection of William Arnett

9. *Even the Handicapped Man Can Get Rich*, 1989
wooden crutches, barbed wire, metal, industrial sealing compound, house paint; 66" x 25" x 37"
Collection of William Arnett

10. *Bird-Catcher Lady*, 1987
metal strips, wire, concrete, industrial sealing compound, house paint; 32 1/2" x 9" x 7 1/2"
Collection of William Arnett

11. *Old Klu Klux*, 1989
hemp rope, plastic can lids, industrial sealing compound, house paint on wood; 48" x 48 1/4" x 8"
Collection of William Arnett

12. *Discrimination and Electricity*, 1992
enamel, wire, cloth, rubber, tin, industrial sealing compound on canvas mounted on wood; 48" x 58" x 6"
Collection of William Arnett

THORNTON DIAL, JR.

13. *The Gorilla Lends a Helping Hand to the United States and the Telephone Company*, 1988
plastic coated wire, mop string, carpet, carpet backing, wire, house paint on wood; 48" x 52 1/2" x 5"
Collection of William Arnett

14. *Jesus Christ of All the Races*, 1988
metal tubing, barbed wire, aluminum pop top, industrial sealing compound, house paint on wood; 46" x 31 1/2" x 14"
Collection of William Arnett

15. *Throne of the King of Africa*, 1989
wood, flexible hose, carpet, industrial sealing compound, house paint; 33" x 52" x 55"
Collection of William Arnett

RALPH GRIFFIN

16. *Head Doing Backstroke*, 1988
wood, paint; 18 1/2" x 30" x 36"
Collection of Robert Cargo Folk Art Gallery

17. *Submarine Trout*, 1988
wood, paint; 14 1/2" x 27" x 23"
Collection of Robert Cargo Folk Art Gallery

18. *Bell-Head Man*, 1989
wood, paint; 26" x 27" x 6"
Collection of Robert Cargo Folk Art Gallery

19. *Devil*, 1988
wood, paint; 20" x 9" x 15"
Collection of Robert Cargo Folk Art Gallery

20. *Witch*, 1988
wood, paint; 25 1/2" x 17" x 15 1/2"
Collection of Robert Cargo Folk Art Gallery

21. *The Laghorns*, ca. 1988
wood, paint, shell bead necklace; father 25" x 11" x 9", mother 17" x 15" x 8", child 14" x 7" x 7"
Collection of Robert Cargo Folk Art Gallery

22. *Wizard*, 1990
wood, paint; 12" x 4" x 6 5/8"
Collection of Lew Deadmore

BESSIE HARVEY

23. *Creation is a Burst of All Colors*, 1991
marbles, glitter, felt and rhinestone button, paint, wood; 47" x 11" x 7"
Collection of Urban Artware Gallery

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24. *African King*, 1987
wood, plastic beads, feathers, acrylic paint on tree root; 36" x 20" x 12 1/2"
Collection of William Arnett

25. *Poison of the Lying Tongues*, 1987
wood, tree root, pebbles, acrylic paint; 20" x 19" x 13"
Collection of William Arnett

26. *Warrior*, 1985
painted wood, beads, costume jewelry, woodputty, ribbons, plastic flowers; 48" x 25" x 10"
Collection of Cavin-Morris Gallery

LONNIE HOLLEY

27. *Trail of Tears*, 1991
skull, mandible, feathers, artificial flowers and other found materials; 34" x 46" x 12"
Collection of A. Everett James

28. *Ode to South African Blacks*, 1991
painted shovel; 19" x 8 1/2" x 17"
Collection of A. Everett James

29. *You Can't Replace Real Life*, 1992
wood, plastic, wire, fabric and found objects; 68" x 22 1/2" x 9"
Collection of William Arnett

30. *Looking Back into the Memories of a Worker*, 1990
rusted metal, wire, artificial flowers, found objects; 53 1/2" x 53" x 33"
Collection of William Arnett

31. *Eyes of the Labor Man*, 1991
rusted metal, wire, container lids, cotton twine, fabric, paint, wood; 78" x 22 1/2" x 9"
Collection of William Arnett

32. *Fighting at the Foot of the Cross*, 1988
wood, metal wire, plastic coated wire, found metal objects; 60" x 38" x 14"
Collection of William Arnett

33. *Remedicating*, 1992
aluminum and tin umbrella frame, plastic syringes, air conditioning pump, copper tubing, cloth; 66" x 25" x 70"
Collection of the artist

JOE LIGHT

34. *Thank the Lord*, 1987
metal pipe, mirror, horseshoe, aluminum and brass containers, paint, wood; 56" x 40" x 19"
Collection of William Arnett

35. Untitled, 1987
linoleum tile, rusted metal toy car, auto tail light, metal clippers, paint, wood; 14 1/2" x 81 1/2" x 4"
Collection of William Arnett

RONALD LOCKETT

36. *Tree of Life*, 1992
wood, metal, canvas, fabric, wooden twigs, found wooden frame, cardboard, industrial sealing compound, acrylic paint; 48" x 69" x 7"
Collection of William Arnett

37. *Traps*, 1990
wood, metal, wooden twigs, plastic bird/flower ornament, plastic fence, housepaint; 48" x 48" x 3"
Collection of William Arnett

CHARLIE LUCAS

38. *When the Brain Melts Down, the Dog Eats*, 1987
rusted metal strips, container lid, bicycle and machine parts, wood; 44" x 49" x 12"
Collection of William Arnett

39. *Time Man*, 1987
rusted metal wire, bicycle parts, machine parts, oven rack; 80" x 38" x 33"
Collection of William Arnett

40. *Radio Man*, 1988
pipe, transistors, plastic coated wire, metal tubing, found metal objects, auto wheel hub; 75 1/2" x 24" x 20"
Collection of William Arnett

41. *Old Wheel Don't Roll Anymore*, 1988
rusted metal, machine parts, bicycle wheel, auto wheel hub; 60" x 18" x 18"
Collection of William Arnett

42. *The Duck*, 1991
paint, dirt, rubber hose, clothespin, wooden dowel, wood chips, staples, plastic, plastic lid, plywood; 17 1/2" x 23"
Collection of A. Everett James

LEROY PERSON

43. *Blue Throne*, ca. 1980
paint, crayon wax, scrap wood, nails; 35 1/2" x 26" x 28"
Robert Lynch Collection of Outsider Art, North Carolina Wesleyan College

44. *Brown Throne*, ca. 1980
scrap wood, Masonite, aluminum strip, paint; 42" x 34" x 23"
Robert Lynch Collection of Outsider Art, North Carolina Wesleyan College

45. *Desk*, 1981
crayon wax, scrap wood, nails; 40 1/2" x 16 1/2" x 16"
Collection of Roger Manley

46. Five wire baskets, ca. 1970-1980
insulated telephone wire, copper wire, metal springs, aluminum fencing; 4" x 6" x 6" (smallest) to 11 1/4" x 10 1/2" x 9 3/4" (largest)
Robert Lynch Collection of Outsider Art, North Carolina Wesleyan College

JUANITA ROGERS

47. Headless Woman, ca. 1980
mud, bone, found materials; 10" x 10" x 7"
Collection of Anton Haardt

48. Dog with Big Nostrils, ca. 1980
mud, bone, found materials; 11" x 12" x 14"
Collection of Anton Haardt

49. Dog with Long Ears, ca. 1980
mud, bone, found materials; 11" x 12" x 13"
Collection of Anton Haardt

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50. Dog with Teeth; ca. 1980
mud, bone, found materials; 8" x 8" x 10"
Collection of Anton Haardt

51. Headless Woman, ca. 1980
mud, bone, found materials; 8" x 9" x 10"
Collection of Anton Haardt

52. Dog with Black Nose, ca. 1980
mud, bone, found materials; 12" x 15" x 16"
Collection of Anton Haardt

ARTHUR SPAIN

53. Untitled bottle construction, 1967
whiskey bottle, carved wood, ballpoint pen, enamel, glue, glitter;
8 1/2" x 4" x 2"
Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Richard Craven

54. Untitled bottle construction, 1976
whiskey bottle, carved wood, ballpoint pen, enamel, glue, glitter;
8 1/2" x 4" x 2"
Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Richard Craven

55. Untitled bottle construction, 1977
whiskey bottle, carved wood, ballpoint pen, enamel, glue, glitter;
8 1/2" x 4" x 2"
Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Richard Craven

JIMMIE LEE SUDDUTH

56. *Dog*, 1991
paint, earth, sugar, chalk, plywood; 29" x 18"
Collection of Penny Demetriades

57. *Self-Portrait*, 1991
paint, earth, sugar, coffee grounds, plywood; 48" x 29"
Collection of Penny Demetriades

58. *Anita Hill*, 1992
paint, earth, plywood; 24" x 24"
Collection of Su Peterson

59. *Georgetown Building*, 1991
paint, sugar, earth, chalk, plywood; 32" x 16"
Collection of Mike and Lisa Eller Smith

60. *Woman in the Green Skirt*, 1991
paint, sugar, earth, plywood; 25" x 17"
Collection of Mike and Lisa Eller Smith

61. *Statue of Liberty*, 1989
paint, sugar, earth, plywood; 32" x 24"
Collection of Howard Smith

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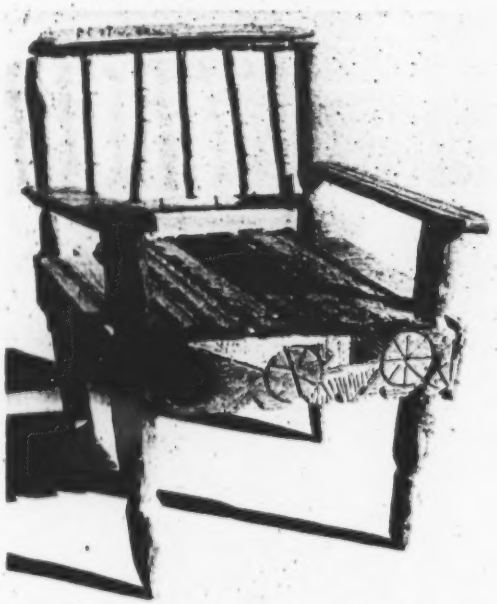

Leroy Person, *Blue Throne* (cat. no. 43) Photo by Roger Manley

Thomas Jefferson Bowman
decorated cane (detail) cat. no. 71

Photo by Richard Hackel

Digga Gallery at WSSU is pleased to host "ASHE: IMPROVISATION & RECYCLING IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN VISIONARY ART." We would like to thank all of the exhibiting artists; Tom Patterson, for his successful partnership with WSSU; Jan Oliver Alms of Gallery Graphics, for his imaginative and thoughtful catalogue design and the joy of collaboration; Mark Kingsley Fine Art Conservation for special assistance with exhibit preparation; Henley Paper Company, General Binding Company, Pictorial Engraving, and William Ainsett, for donations to the production of the catalog; lenders to the exhibition, Roger Manley, Mike Smith, and the Blue Spiral Gallery for contributing photographic portraits of some of the artists; Chris Redd, for installation and exhibition design; Judith McWillie, Regenia Perry, and Robert Farris Thompson, for taking part in the "Ashe Festival"; and special thanks to the gallery staff for their daily commitment to Digga Gallery: Lindsay Robinson, administrative assistant, and Joel McIver, gallery assistant.

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